

Geographic configuration of family networks –regional differences in geographical proximity to parents, siblings and adult children

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There is substantial regional variation in share of elderly in relation to people in working ages which has led to a concern about potential future support rates (Carson 2011), but alongside the uneven geographical distribution of elderly in relation to younger, there is also potentially variation in access to family networks among elderly in urban and rural areas. The need for formal care is potentially higher if the informal care is scarce, and in regions where few elderly have a local family network, pressure increases on support from public sector. The informal support that families provide is however important to human well-being of both older and younger generations. The local family network should be seen as a resource for all ages where not least the elderly make a significant contribution, studies in Sweden and in Europe have shown that the flow of both financial and functional support between the generations is greater from the older generation to the younger compared rather than the other way around (Albertini et al. 2007; Halleröd 2006; Hoff 2007). The focus of this study is the regional differences in proximity between family members and the demographic processes that produce geographic variation in elderly people's access to family networks with special attention to how this pattern is shaped by previous and contemporary migration flows.

Geographical distance between family members is the result of accumulated migration and non-migration in all generations in different phases of life resulting in staying close, moving away or moving closer to family members. Selection in migration patterns are reflected in the configuration of family networks and shapes structural and regional differences in the family landscape. Migration is highly age selective and young people are more mobile than older (Lundholm 2007; Eliasson et.al. 2008). The migration pattern on aggregated level sets its marks in family structures on the regional level. For instance; the typical pattern in an urbanization period is that older generations are left behind in the rural areas while the younger generations starts their family in an urban setting. In the next phase, the generations born in the urban areas are more likely to stay in proximity to their parents.

Malmberg and Pettersson (2008) showed in a previous study, that there indeed are differences between urban and rural areas as it is more common in rural areas that elderly people live far from their children while elderly living in cities are more likely to have children in the same region. However, it is common for parents and children who live in the same region also live

very near each other in rural compared to urban areas (ibid.). Malmberg and Pettersson (2008) also shows how urbanization processes made long-term imprint on the intergenerational distances between cohorts, where urbanization generation ends up far away from their parents while younger generations are living with a shorter distance to their parents. The current project could help to further develop knowledge of the geographical contexts of family networks, and the characteristics of regions with dense and less dense family networks. The project included geographical proximity between children, siblings and parents, and family partners. This study further develops thus Malmberg and Petterson's study by including a larger family network that includes siblings and partners family.

Empirical study

The empirical study is based on Swedish register data where it is possible to identify the family networks in their geographical context on various geographic scales, down to neighborhood level. The data is stored in the Linnaeus database covers the total Swedish population and include the Swedish multigenerational register and it is thereby possible to identify parents, children and siblings, but also in-laws in terms of partners' parents and siblings. The use of geographic information system (GIS) enables spatial analysis and is a powerful tool to illustrate regional differences in the density of family networks.

In the study 60-year-olds in 2009 (born 1949) is compared to 60-year-olds in 1992 (born 1932). 60 year olds are chosen as most of their children have left their most mobile age. Most moves are undertaken at a young age, after 30 migration propensity decreases significantly.

The study is designed to capture family network proximity in three generations, i) own generation including siblings and partner's sibling, ii) older generation, including parents and partners parents and, iii) younger generation including adult children. The study of density of family networks in these three dimensions could be related to general patterns of urbanization and counter-urbanization

Regional comparisons are done by using for instance the classification of municipalities by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. The municipalities are divided into ten groups on the basis of structural parameters such as population, commuting patterns, tourism and travel industry and economic structure.

One way to describe the patterns of family networks and make regional comparisons is to use the following classification:

[Dense] dense networks in three generations, own, parents and children

[Left behinds] Dense networks in own and older generation but children far away

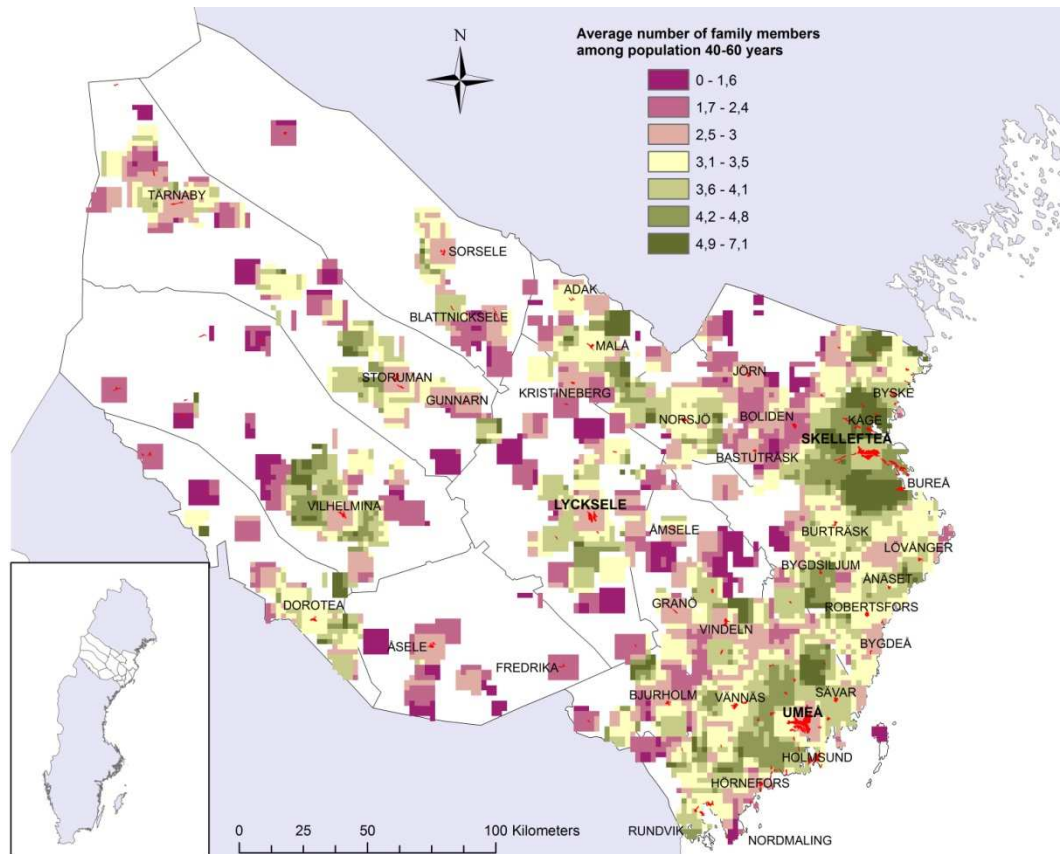
[Settlers] weak family network in own and parents generation but close to children

[Solitary] weak/no local family network

[Childless/Solitary]

[childless/dense]

Preliminary findings from Västerbotten county only are that there is indeed regional variation in terms of density of family networks, not only between rural and urban areas but also within the spatial categories.



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